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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000220

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: IDF'S HALUTZ WARNS OF HAMAS ELECTION SUCCESS AND
GOI RESPONSE

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary: IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz predicted to A/S Welch, DAPNSA Abrams, and the Ambassador on January 13 that Hamas will win at least 40 percent of the votes in the upcoming PLC elections and will seek ministerial positions within the government. Halutz said that the GOI cannot negotiate with Hamas if they take office. He said the GOI may be forced to close Karni on January 15 because of a terrorist threat against the terminal itself, and that Israel made a mistake by allowing for additional time for PA President Abbas to crack down on terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza. Halutz also criticized the Lebanese President's failure to fight Hizballah, but said that it was positive news that the U.S. and EU now seem to have a common position regarding Iran's nuclear challenge. Halutz claimed that terrorists on the "not authorized list" have managed to transit Rafah in recent days with forged documents and identities. End summary.

Hamas is not planning to sit quietly once in office

2. (C) IDF Chief of Staff Major General Dan Halutz met with Assistant Secretary Welch, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Abrams, Ambassador Jones, USSC Lt. General Dayton, the DATT, and EmbOffs January 13 to discuss the security situation in Israel. Halutz predicted that Hamas will win at least 40 percent of the vote in the January 25 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections. Halutz said that the figure could be as much as 50 percent of the vote, but that the difference between the two numbers was unimportant because Israel cannot negotiate with Hamas unless they declare an end to terrorism. Responding to a question from A/S Welch regarding the possibilities for cooperation should Hamas continue to keep the calm after elections but not disarm, Halutz said, "If Hamas wants to be puppets then OK, but they are running to win and they want a place in the ministries."

3. (C) When queried by the Ambassador, Halutz said that the GOI is maintaining and will continue working level, day-to-day contacts with Palestinians, but that these ongoing contacts have no effect on the stalled political dialogue. According to Halutz, in municipalities where Hamas is in power, such as Nablus and Kakiliya, the IDF is in contact with Hamas through surrogates. Should Hamas capture national level offices, however, Halutz said that it will not be possible to have political dialogue. Halutz admitted that there is no political dialogue or ongoing negotiations with the current PA leadership, but that given the lack of progress in ruling Gaza, the PA should not expect such things.

4. (C) Halutz suggested that it is possible that Hamas participation in the elections will turn them away from terror as they become involved in the problems of governance. However, he did not give this a high probability. Halutz also theorized that Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza may begin to split with the Hamas leadership in Damascus after elections. "In some situations, it's best to wait and see," Halutz cautioned, as it is possible that, after ten months of relative calm, Hamas will soon be back to its old ways and again engage in widespread terrorism. A/S Welch told Halutz that the USG remains committed to making sure that the elections occur as scheduled.

Abbas is not taking on the terrorists

5. (C) Halutz said that Abbas has committed to passing anti-terror legislation within one month of PLC elections, but he added that if Abbas were serious about creating calm and an end to terrorism, he would have at least taken the opportunity over the last few months to act against Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Halutz said he expects a second round of violence to occur after PLC elections, when it is clear that the GOI will not negotiate with Hamas. Responding to a question from DAPNSA Abrams on why PA security forces are failing to crack down on terror, Halutz said "they (PA security forces) do not have clear orders from the political leadership. It is not a question of competency. Look at their enemy (Fatah terrorist

organizations). The security forces are more competent than the terrorists." Halutz said that Abbas's unwillingness to confront Hamas but to "sink them in honey" would ultimately prove unsuccessful.

GOI might have to close Karni

16. (C) Halutz said that the GOI may have to close the Karni crossing between Gaza and Israel on January 15 due to intelligence reports that a tunnel is being dug in the area to be used in a terrorist attack against the terminal itself. While Halutz said that the IDF is not sure of the exact location of the tunnel, "we cannot risk the lives of Israeli civilian employees and the Palestinian people who would be killed at the crossing if there is an attack."

AMA

17. (C) With regard to the November 15 Agreement on Movement and Access, Halutz said that the GOI intends to do "all the right things," such as: keeping the crossings open whenever possible; conducting a weekly assessment of the security situation to determine the number of Palestinians who should be allowed to work in Israel; and making movement as free as possible in the West Bank without endangering Israeli citizens living there as long as there is not too much risk involved. Halutz said, however, that there is no possibility of beginning convoys between Gaza and the West Bank until after PLC elections. He reasoned that in future negotiations Israel would demand that "each and every letter of every word be negotiated with the Palestinians." Halutz said he believes it was a mistake for Israel to agree even to the concept that Abbas should be allowed more time to begin fighting Hamas and PIJ.

Lebanon and Syria

18. (C) Halutz criticized President Siniora's decision that Hizballah's continued status as an armed militia not be considered a violation of UNSC resolution 1559. Halutz described what he said is Hizballah's evolving plans to kidnap Israeli civilians or military personnel along the border as an attempt to deflect attention from internal Hizballah political woes. Halutz described President Asad as very nervous and very short-sighted in his recent actions. Halutz cautioned, "we don't know how Asad acts when under pressure, and he is under hard pressure."

Iran

19. (C) Halutz said that he had heard the Secretary's message on the Iranian nuclear challenge and that it is positive that the USG and EU now share the same message. Halutz said that Israel still believes that the matter should urgently be referred to the UNSC, but that Israel will maintain a low public profile on the issue.

Southern Border

10. (C) When asked by DAPNSA Abrams about plans for security along Israel's southern border, Halutz said that the border between Israel and Egypt is already being strengthened with additional troops (two battalions) and that plans are underway to add a brigade-size command post. He also said that the GOI plans to invest funds sufficient to physically and virtually (through technology) seal the border to prevent smuggling. Halutz described Rafah as a "sad story," but commented that the Egyptians are improving control on their side of the border. Halutz said he thinks the Egyptians understand the seriousness of the situation after the attacks last week that resulted in the deaths of Egyptian security personnel. Halutz claimed that Palestinian terrorists who are on the "not authorized" list have managed to transit Rafah in recent days by using forged documents and fake identities.

11. (U) A/S Welch and DAPNSA Abrams cleared this message.

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JONES